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## **Testimony on Senate Bill 537: Regulation of Aquaculture**

Thank you, Chairman Kedzie, and the rest of the members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environment for giving me the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Bill 537. There are few major provisions of the bill I would like to explain in my testimony:

In the first provision of the bill, we address permitting in the natural bodies of water. The bill allows the DNR to be flexible when issuing natural water body permits. The bill provides that unless there is a significant change or interest in a specific body of water, the permit for a fish farm operation on that body of water does not expire. If something in the situation for that body of water changes, the DNR can require the fish farm to reapply for permitting. This strikes a balance between the interest of streamlining the permitting process and protecting natural bodies of water.

Second, the bill eliminates the discharge fees that fish farmers pay. The provisions of the bill make these fees more in line with other agriculture fees. This will be an additional incentive for those looking into starting a fish farm operation or expanding a current farm.

Third, in order to reduce duplication of efforts, the bill exempts those that already have a DATCP-issued health certificate for fish from needing an import permit when moving fish from farm to farm. This ensures the health of the fish while making it easier for the farmers wishing to move fish or fish eggs from farm to farm.

Finally, current law requires the farmer to record the name and address of every individual who purchases farm-raised fish, even for personal use. Senate Bill 537 also eliminates the record-keeping by the owner of the fish farm if the fish are for personal use by the customer. This would be beneficial for those farmers that choose to sell their product at farmer markets and retail bait stores.

The authors of the bill have worked with the Wisconsin Aquaculture Association and the Department of Natural Resources to come up with a bill that will help an important industry while maintaining reasonable environmental standards for bodies of water. It is our hope that this bill will make permitting for fish farms less complex for those hoping to start their own fish farming business or expand an existing farm.

I have a constituent that operates a fish farm. They would like to expand, as the demand for their product exceeds their capacity to produce. An expansion will increase their employment.

Thank you.